The Black Cat

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"Ah! Ah!"
Cried the house-wife,
The secret I know,
No DIRT can resist
SAPOLIO
Oh! Oh!
Cried the DIRT,
At length I must go,
I cannot withstand
SAPOLIO

The Black Cat

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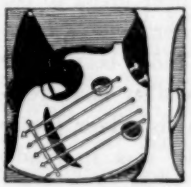
The Moon Table Boy.*

BY LOUISE OCTAVIAN.



IT was in the Gable Room that we found it — our bewildering moon table — our dear, dingy, shaky-legged moon table!

"Take any piece of furniture you fancy from the rooms above," sweet Aunt Persis had graciously said, and Millicent and I had spent the livelong, dreary September afternoon in a soul-satisfying revel among treasures of Sheraton and Chippendale, and Heppelwhite; and the tinkling five-o'clock tea bell found us still hovering in rapturous indecision around old-time chairs, and tables, and mirrors.

"It's no use," wailed Millicent, "I adore this Colonial chair, but my heart yearneth for that beautiful mahogany bureau, and frenzy seizeth me at the thought of leaving this picture mirror, — and as for this glorious oak settle — There, Neville, *do* decide quickly, and let's hurry down, for your aunt is waiting tea for us."

Just behind us was a stairway — a narrow, winding stairway — leading up to a low, arched door.

"One moment for a peep into the Gable Room," said I, and Millicent followed me willingly enough.

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Only a small, scantily furnished room, — a dusty, cobwebby room. Only two or three uninteresting chairs; a cedar-wood chest; an old, old spinnet, with worn and blackened keys; high gable windows, heavily framed in clinging vines; and beneath the largest, the late afternoon sun shining full upon its battered mahogany top, a small table, — crescent-shaped, slender-legged, and exquisitely inlaid with ebony and satin woods.

"*A moon table!*" gasped I.

"*A moon table!*" breathed Millicent.

Again the five-o'clock tea bell tinkled faintly far below, and we sped down the winding stairway.

A moon table! Our heart's desire! Our dearest dream!

. . . . . .

My great-aunt Persis was waiting, very erect and dignified in her carved oak chair; beautifully dressed, as she ever loved to be, in a lacy, white gown; wonderful amethysts in her silvery hair, wonderful amethysts upon her fragile fingers. Close beside her stretched Kiddle-a-wink, the silver Yorkshire, his silky head resting lovingly upon her foot. The tea-table, with its silver lustre service, and its quaint old green-and-white cups, was in readiness.

Aunt Persis greeted us with a benignant smile. "Did you find anything that pleased you, dear children?" she asked.

"The moon table. Oh, the moon table!" we cried in unison.

My great-aunt's fingers trembled ever so slightly as she lifted the teapot. "Owen's table," said she slowly, "my little brother Owen's moon table."

"Can you really part with it?" we ventured breathlessly.

"I should not like it to go out of the family," said Aunt Persis, "but I am willing that any of my dear nephews or nieces should have it; and to you, Neville and Millicent, I will give it with especial pleasure."

"We will put it in the Book Room," said Millicent.

"Assuredly, in the Book Room," I agreed. "Aunt Persis, this is magnificently generous of you!"

"Owen's table," went on Aunt Persis, unheeding our expressions of gratitude and delight. "Pretty little Owen . . . your

little granduncle, Neville . . . He was just ten years old the very day he died . . . If you weary of the table, Neville and Millicent, my dears, you can send it back, remember."

"Weary of the moon table!"—"Aunt Persis!"

"He was a still, old-fashioned child,—my little brother Owen," continued Aunt Persis. "Fond of books and music—very fond of music. . . . He had a sweet, high voice, and his little fingers touched the piano keys so lovingly. He found our grandmother's old spinnet up in some dark attic corner, and dragged it down to the Gable Room. And, oh, the hours and hours he would sit at the moon table making notes! . . . Queer little notes, with such crooked stems, and bulging, out-of-shape heads. . . . There are ink-stains on the mahogany now. I've never washed them off."

"We never will either," promised Millicent.

"And if you weary of the table and wish to send it back to the Gable Room, and select a chair or a mirror, or anything else instead, remember to pack it very carefully. Wrap it up well with burlap, and use plenty of straw."

"Dear Aunt Persis," cried I, "how could we ever wish to exchange your beautiful gift!"

"Why, we've been pining for a moon table for months!" said Millicent.

Aunt Persis smiled,—slowly, inscrutably. She stooped and patted Kiddle-a-wink's silky head. The amethysts on her fingers sparkled and flashed. The amethysts in her hair glistened and gleamed.

"I have given it away five times," she said.

"Given it away five times!"

"Yes, Neville and Millicent."

"And it has been returned!"

"Always returned."

Callers were announced, and the moon table subject was closed. When we started for home the next morning, the table, carefully crated, preceded us to the station.

"I think Fay will like Owen's table," said Aunt Persis to my wife in farewell. And to me in an impressive aside, "Mind you wrap it up carefully when you send it back, Neville. . . .

It was Owen's table, you know, Neville, my little brother Owen's favorite moon table."

. . . . . .

We gave the moon table the place of honor in the most artistic corner of the Book Room. We dusted it diligently several times a day, we kept bowls of flowers always upon it, and we religiously cherished the ink-stains that commemorated little Owen's musical aspirations. True to my grandaunt's predictions, baby Fay, our three-year-old daughter, liked the table. Oddly enough, it seemed to possess for her a subtle charm, a mysterious allurement, and much of her time was spent in standing beside it, patting it lovingly, caressing the spidery legs, and tracing the inlaid design over and over again with her wee forefinger. If we missed her for a little while, she was always sure to be found in the Book Room, close to the moon table. Often she would walk round and round it, examining it with the gravest attention, and apparently looking for something.

"What is it, baby?" I asked. "What is Fay looking for?"

"Dwawer," said Fay.

"Drawer?"

"Es, dwawer. Baby want dwawer."

"This table has no drawer, my pet," said I.

"Es, dwawer," persisted Fay. "Boy's dwawer."

"What boy's?"

"Moon table boy's."

"Oh, what a nonsense, baby!" I laughed, rumpling her chestnut curls.

"Neville, why do you suppose the table was returned?" asked Millicent abruptly.

"Returned?"

"Yes — to Aunt Persis, you know. Five times she said. I wonder why."

"I cannot conjecture, my love," I replied. "Nor do I care to solve the mystery. It is *ours* — *ours* — *ours* — this adorable moon table, and I can but rejoice in whatsoever mad caprice returned it to the Gable Room those five times. It is a genuine Heppelwhite, and I am entirely satisfied therewith, albeit my daughter doth sigh for a drawer."

Not long after this we heard Fay humming a strange little air. An elusive, minor thing, with a haunting *motif,* and a fascinating rhythm, with just a hint of syncopation. Neither her mother nor I had ever heard it before.

"What are you singing, Fay," I asked.

"Moon table boy song," said she.

"And whom did you hear singing it, O Fayrie mine?"

"Moon table boy," said she, and went on humming.

"It is very strange," said Millicent uneasily.

It certainly was strange. Every day, and almost every hour, she hummed the little air, and sometimes, standing before the moon table, she would fall to tapping the rhythm of the music she hummed.

"She is very musical. Just hear her mark the time!" said Millicent proudly.

"Perhaps she takes after her great-great-uncle Owen," said I.

. . . . . .

One windy November night, as I lounged in my den, yawning over a cigar, and a volume of Elizabethan verse, my wife rushed in, precipitated herself upon me, and clutching my shoulder frantically, began to shiver in an alarming and unaccountable manner.

"What is it, child?" I asked apprehensively.

"Singing," said Millicent hoarsely.

"Singing? Where?"

"In the Book Room. I went down after something I left on the hall table, and I heard singing in the Book Room, singing, soft and sweet and dreamy. Oh, Neville, the queer little tune Fay is always humming."

"It was the wind, girlie," said I. "Nothing but the wind. Demons, fiends and furies are in the wind to-night. Hear them shriek! Hear them wail! Horkos, son of the Erinyes, most fearful among the gods of Hell, is leading the chorus! No wonder you heard things."

I went down, to return in a moment with the comforting assurance that the Book Room was quite unoccupied and dismally silent. Millicent was already laughing at her fright. "Of course it was the wind," she agreed. "Neville, did you ever see me such a

goose?" Then she began to shiver again. "Oh, Neville, Neville," she sobbed, "why do you suppose the moon table was returned five times?"

. . . . . .

The following night, the preparation of a lecture on Schiller's use of Greek technique kept me at my desk till very late. A heavy rain was falling, the wind still wailed and moaned around the house, and dead sprays of woodbine rattled drearily against the window-panes.

My desk was in a curtained recess at one end of the Book Room, and in the corner diagonally opposite, near the fireplace, and just beside Millicent's old English clock, stood the moon table. I was using but one light this evening, — the green-shaded electric lamp above my desk, — and had partly drawn the Japanese curtain.

Midnight came, and passed, and my work was still unfinished. The rain dripped monotonously upon the veranda-roof, and the woodbine rattled wierdly.

I opened *"Die Braut von Messina"* to verify a quotation.

Tap — tap — tap, went the woodbine.

"'Eherner Füsse . . . Rauschen vernehin ich,'" I read. "'Höllischer Schlangen, Zischendes Tönen'" . . . How distractingly that vine did rattle! . . . "'Ich erkenne der Furien'" . . . What was that?

There was singing in the room. Singing — low and dreary. A sweet, familiar strain. Parting the curtain gently I glanced across the dim spaces of the room to the corner faintly illumined by the firelight.

He was sitting upon the moon table — the sweet singer. A frail slip of a boy, in black velvet, with a deep lace collar and silver-buckled shoes. He had dark hair, and hazel eyes — long *spirituelle* eyes — and a very Roman profile. He drummed lightly upon the table with his long, nervous fingers, and sang in a plaintive soprano:

"'Inside my father's close,
(Fly away, O my heart, away!)
Sweet apple-blossom blows
So sweet.'"

It was Fay's haunting, minor melody. The tune she hummed.

The rhythm she tapped. Fay's strange moon table boy song!

"Three king's daughters fair,
(Fly away, O my heart, away!)
They lie below it there,
So sweet."

The old English clock in the corner struck the half hour, and the boy, pausing in his song, regarded the tall time-piece gravely. The strands of the bamboo curtain that I had been holding aside slipped through my fingers with a faint, rustling noise, and when I parted them again the moon table boy had vanished. The fire-light cast ever-changing shadows upon the wall; the rain dripped heavily, heavily, upon the roof, and the woodbine was tapping — tapping — tapping.

"Dear child," said I to the invisible presence I felt might still be lingering in the moon table corner," your music is sweet indeed, and I like you passing well, but I cannot have my wife fall prey to hysteria, neither can I permit my daughter to hobnob with ghosts, — *ergo*, my charming moon table boy, I find myself compelled to send your favorite article of furniture back to the Gable Room."

So, for the sixth time the lovely Heppelwhite table journeyed back to its donor, carefully packed with plenty of straw, and a lavish supply of burlap, and accompanied by a note telling Aunt Persis that, after all, we found that the oak settle would be more in keeping with our room.

The oak settle, which arrived promptly, with an affectionate note from my grandaunt, was enthusiastically greeted by Millicent, but Fay murmured for the old table, and I, too, missed the valuable antique and rather regretted my hasty decision.

"The finest Heppelwhite that ever I saw," I told myself remorsefully . . . "I was dreaming that night — dreaming over Schiller!"

"Inside my father's close,
(Fly away, O my heart, away!")

Over and over I seemed to hear the plaintive strain. . . . Had I dreamed it after all?

. . . . . .

The New Year found me again at my grandaunt's. No allusion was made to the exchange of furniture. In the Gable Room

I found the moon table. Somehow I was glad to see it there in the cobwebby window-nook once more. Somehow it seemed a very fitting thing that Owen's table should be back in Owen's room.

"Good-bye, beautiful table," I murmured as I turned away. "Good-bye, old Gable Room . . . Good-bye, pretty moon table boy!" . . . And then I tarried yet a moment to brush away a large spider that was crawling slowly across the delicate inlay.

Came a click — came a rattle — and then a scraping sound, — and, lo, before my eyes a tiny drawer sprang open! Somewhere in the ornamentation was concealed a spring which my thrust at the spider had set in motion. Yes, little Fay, there *was* indeed a "dwawer" in the moon table.

In the drawer was a scrap of paper, yellow and torn and soiled. I unfolded it eagerly, yet very gently, lest it crumple beneath my touch. It contained several bars of closely-written music, very evidently the work of an inexperienced composer. Very badly made were the notes, with crooked stems, and blurred and ill-shaped heads. Crazy rests were sprinkled here and there adown the page, and many blots rendered parts of the manuscript illegible. Turning to the spinnet I picked it out laboriously.

Tinkle — tinkle — tinkle — came the hollow, ghostly tones. Faintly — very faintly — in a whispering, spiritlike pianissimo, sounded the plaintive melody, the halting, half-syncopated rhythm of the *moon table boy song!*

On the other side of the paper was written in an uneven, childish hand:

"Inside my father's close,
(Fly away, O my heart, away!)
Sweet apple-blossom blows
So sweet."

. . . . . .

I put the paper back, closed the secret drawer, and went down to five-o'clock tea. Aunt Persis was waiting, amethysts gleaming in her silvery hair, amethysts glimmering in her lacy gown.

"This was Owen's cup," she told me as she poured my tea. "Pretty little Owen . . . your little granduncle, you know, Neville, my dear. . . . He had black hair, and long, hazel eyes. . . . He looked like the pictures of Julius Cæsar in the old

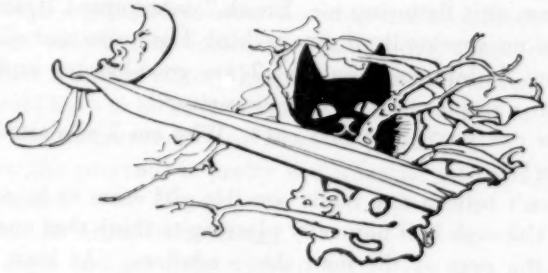
history-book. . . . He could play the spinnet . . . and sing sweetly . . . so sweetly."

Dreamily I stirred my tea in Owen's green-and-white tea-cup.

"Three king's daughters fair,
(Fly away, O my heart, away!")

I could almost hear the quaint old song! I could almost see the gentle singer!

Yes, I was glad that the moon table was back in the Gable Room.



The Girl, the Man — and Cupid.*

BY FRED S. BROWN.

AM going to marry you, if I have to take you to the altar in a cage."

There was no hesitation or stammering on Frank Clearing's part in making love to the fascinating Helen Rockwell. He candidly declared that she was the handsomest creature he ever saw.

"I want you to be my wife, not only because you are entrancingly beautiful, but for the reason that you are so sensible and sweet in disposition," he said. "You know it is frequently the case that really beautiful girls are silly. You are not giddy and foolish like many giggling——"

"Please quit flattering me, Frank," interrupted Helen. "You have told me repeatedly that you think I am nice and all that, but when you declare so often that I am good-looking and sensible, you raise a suspicion as to your sincerity."

"How can you figure that out? Why am I suspected of being insincere?"

"I don't believe any really sensible girl cares to be continually lauded, although it is naturally pleasing to think that one is attractive in the eyes of the man she — admires. At least, it is my opinion that a true woman entertains the belief that when anyone is openly praising her, as a paragon, it is done to appeal to her vanity — the more praise, the greater vanity she is assumed to possess. I don't like persons who are too vain."

"I don't know but you are right, Helen. But I do think you are the sweetest girl that ever was, all the same. That is, I mean to say you suit me to death. And that is why I want you to be my wife — now, right away. Will you?"

"Frank, I can't."

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"Why, don't you love me?"

"I admire you. I respect you."

"Then there must be some other man."

"There is — your father."

"What! Do you know the governor?"

"I never saw him, but that doesn't alter the case."

"Great Stonewall Jackson, Helen! I can't understand you. The old gentleman doesn't give a rap about whom or when I marry."

"Don't get in a panic, Frank. You know your rich and imperative father didn't care when your brother got married, but he took a dislike to your sister-in-law and made life miserable for her. I am not going to take chances of being subjected to the refined agony that your father can cause if the notion seizes him. We might as well have a clear understanding now, rather than when it is too late. Plainly speaking, your father, you know, can be the most disagreeable person to his own family that ever was. And the worst of it is, he does and says heart-breaking, soul-torturing things in such a polished manner that they are exquisitely cutting. It is a cruel assertion to make, but he did not spare even your mother when she was alive. Forgive me, but something extraordinary would have to be done to guarantee the peace of any woman subject to the tantrums of your irascible parent."

"I know the governor is pretty bad when he gets going, but we can't kill him."

"No, but he must be reformed."

"Let's elope and get along without him. I can earn a living for both of us."

"Be sensible, Frank. You are too impulsive. It is all well enough to talk about estranging your family for the love of a woman, but we should have respect for our parents, and, besides that, you ought to take warning by the fate of others who have been rendered unhappy by marriages that have divided families. Look at the scandals that have resulted in your own circle of acquaintances. I am too fond of comfort to risk a married life that might mean drudgery for you and none of the gayeties for both of us."

"Yes, but, Helen, my dear sweetheart, that is not the way real

lovers view things. They wed despite everything, and defy everybody."

"Yes, and often accumulate a great deal of genuine misery for themselves. Your notions are not at all up to date. The new way is the more rational, and that's my way."

"I'll take a chance if you will wed me."

"My dear boy, you are too precipitate. Now, I am not saying I would not be pleased to be your wife, but you are going about the affair backwards, so to speak."

"I'll turn around a million times and go any way you suggest, if you will only tell me the direction."

"Then go home and give me an opportunity to think. No, you may not kiss me until we are engaged — if ever that happens."

"I am miserable," wailed Frank. "But let's get married, anyhow. I tell you I am going to have you for my wife if I have to handcuff you."

"Yes, I know. It is real sweet of you to say that, but maybe there is a way to solve the problem. I still maintain that the best way to get at the solution of a difficult case is to approach the central point face forward. What does your father particularly want you to do?"

"He says he expects me to buckle down to business in his office, and prepare to take his place when he dies or gets ready to retire."

"He's right. That's what you ought to do. Your idea of subjecting yourself to a break with your father is foolhardy."

"Really, Helen, I think your refusing me, because of a possible tiff with my father, borders on the ridiculous."

"Remember the case of your brother and his wife. They are now strangers to your father by reason of his temper, and through no fault of your sister-in-law. I would wed you if it could be so arranged that there would be no danger of your father insulting us every time something in his business went wrong. I have no sympathy for those who deliberately step in the way of trouble."

Frank Clearing's father the next day received a call in his office from Miss Helen Rockwell, who was a model of neatness in her attire, and refreshing to look upon, so wholesome, radiant and beautiful did she appear, tastefully arrayed as she was. Mr.

Clearing had never before seen Helen. In fact, he had never heard of her, and her visit puzzled him. At the same time, her appearance dazzled him.

Settling herself comfortably in the proffered chair, the perfectly collected young woman, without waiting to permit the old gentleman to recover from his apparent astonishment, startled him even more by calmly saying:

"Your son, Frank, vows that he will marry me if he has to take me to church in a cage. I have called here to request you to ship him so far away from here that even if he start back immediately upon his arrival at the destination you may select for him, he will have ample time to recover from his imagined infatuation. If I had thought it was presumption on my part to make such a request, I would not have come here. I am merely asserting my rights in a way that I consider reasonable and honorable. Your son refuses to listen to sensible advice from you or from me. Despite your excellent counsel and my refusal to wed him, he persists in imploring me to elope and become his wife. I do not feel that it is I who should be exiled, because I never did anything to ensnare your son, but, on the contrary, have repeatedly pointed out to him the impossibility of our marriage on account of you. I have told him that by marrying me he might bring misery on himself and you — and me. I have tried to convince him that if he risk losing the respect due a parent, he can not expect the woman he marries under such circumstances to repose the confidence in his respect for her that every woman, other than an adventuress or a fortune hunter, should have. But all of my efforts are in vain. Therefore, I deem it the part of wisdom to apprise you of the actual state of affairs as they exist, before any further acts of violence are committed or a foundation is laid for a scandal," and, rising, Helen started toward the door, explaining as she went that she hoped the old gentleman clearly understood her and would promptly take measures to carry out her request.

She had almost forsaken the room before the astounded man could stretch forth a detaining hand and beg her to tarry a moment. As she halted and turned partly around to face Mr. Clearing, he advanced toward her, and bowing courteously, invited her to sit down.

"Give me a minute to think, my dear," said he. "Your extraordinary words have so taken me by surprise that I am at a loss to reply offhand."

If the millionaire thought he was going to receive any assistance from the beautiful girl to whom he was addressing his remarks, he was disappointed, for Helen said nothing.

"You have told me clearly and concisely why you will not wed my son, so I need not ask you to repeat that part of your statement," said Frank's father. "I respect you for your amazing candor. Let me ask you this: 'Do you love my son?'"

"I love him too much to permit him to put his future happiness in jeopardy by contracting an alliance with me that may bring misery. I respect him too much to become his wife when I know that by so doing I might cut him off from his family. Frank is worthy of a leading part in social and business circles, but if handicapped by your enmity, the enormous disadvantage he would labor under would not be compensated by the possession of a wife who might happen to please his fancy."

"Does Frank know of your visit here?"

"Certainly not, sir!"

"You express fear of further acts of violence. I infer from that, that violence has already been done."

"Frank has whipped three young men who aspired to pay their addresses——"

"What! You mean to tell me that lightweight boy of mine licked three men?"

"Yes, and one of them was a big football guard, twice as big as he is. Frank is certainly violent in his manner of making love. He's a whirlwind in affairs of the heart. If he put as much enthusiasm into business pursuits, he undoubtedly would make a glittering success. I told him that, but foolishly he declared he couldn't keep his mind on commerce because he is constantly thinking of me. He said that if I were only his wife, he would have an incentive to work like a good fellow."

When Helen mentioned the fact that Frank Clearing had whipped three rivals, the old gentleman's face lighted up until it fairly beamed. But he quickly threw off his expression of elation, and plumped this question at Helen:

"Is your determination not to go away irrevocable? Could you be induced to change your mind?"

"That is as far as you need proceed on that line, Mr. Clearing. Let me tell you plainly that you haven't enough money to induce me to leave this city, and, unless you really wish to insult me, you will not again refer to the subject of my absenting myself. I came here not to blackmail you."

"Have you any objection to telling me your family history?"

"Not the slightest, if you will explain to me your object in requesting it, in the light of the fact that this is to be our final interview."

. . . . . .

DEAR MISS ROCKWELL: — I personally interviewed the families to whom you referred me in our little chat a few days ago, and if that impetuous son of mine don't marry you, I will, if you will have me. If you choose him, and he ever does anything to cause you unhappiness, I will wring his neck. As for myself, I give you this as a bond to do everything in my power to render your life peaceful and luxurious and nothing to the contrary in case you become my daughter-in-law.

Yours sincerely

I. S. CLEARING.

MY DEAR MR. CLEARING. — If I hadn't met and chosen Frank first, what an honor it would be to become the wife of such a perfectly lovely gentleman as you are. Frank and I are going to be married, and I will not show your note to anybody so long as you are serene, but if you get real cross, I will let you read it. I know you will be the sweetest father-in-law in the world.

Yours lovingly,

HELEN ROCKWELL

"I reckon the new girl is too smart for the old man," soliloquized the senior Clearing, when he had read Helen's note.

The Purple Garden.*

BY JEAN MAHAN PLANK.

RS. GREENLEAF touched nervously the tall pewter tea-urn and glanced at the corner clock. An anxiety, whose origin I did not discern, pervaded the gaunt figure in its shining black silk and the angular features, veiled by a sad benevolence.

Her son, Kingdon, inheriting the angular features without the benevolence, sat opposite in silence during the handing of the cold meats. The strangeness of my first supper in the big, old-fashioned house prevented my asking for whom the extra plate was laid opposite me.

"Where is Gertie?"

Mrs. Greenleaf dropped the question into the air seemingly, for she did not look at anyone. Her gaze was bent vaguely out through the open window to where the cobwebs yoked the elms with filmy festoons and the butterflies still fluttered in the last August sunrays.

After a pause, Kingdon said evenly:

"I have not seen her."

The lady changed the position of the delicate, gold-band teacups before she spoke again.

"She promised to come tonight."

Old Mary paused in her serving and said:

"Miss Gertie's a-comin'."

Glancing at Mrs. Greenleaf, anticipating a look of pleasure, I noticed that her features took on harder lines and her lips twisted slightly. She seemed to force a smile through this expression as a young woman came quickly between the broad, open, front doors and entered the dining-room with graceful movements, that even the wide hoopskirt of the day seemed to enhance.

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"*Pardon—pardon!*" cried the girl, with saucy defiance and a French accent, quite new to me. "I went for a long drive this afternoon and — we lost our way." She gave a significant little laugh as she sank into the chair, her white hands twisting the one long auburn curl that hung over her shoulder.

Mrs. Greenleaf presented me. The girl's face, pretty, with a hard sort of beauty, assumed a mechanically sweet smile, and she nodded carelessly. Evidently a lank, awkward youth who grubbed for bugs and butterflies, and whom Mrs. Greenleaf had charitably taken in on account of the lack in village taverns, held but faint interest for the young lady.

"You have not been here for two weeks, Gertie," said Mrs. Greenleaf, reproachfully.

"Well — you see, my life is very complicated at present. It takes most of my time just to tabulate my engagements and groove them so they will move without friction." She laughed archly.

Mrs. Greenleaf seemed to shrink at the words and laughter as one would shrink at the touch of a pin point.

Kingdon and Gertie exchanged no greeting. The former remained silent as if from habit, and the girl chatted lightly about her own plans. She seemed very young at first. As she turned her head, however, I judged her to be in the late twenties.

Upon leaving the table, Mrs. Greenleaf said, with what seemed unnecessary firmness:

"We are going into the garden."

A barely perceptible shrug moved Gertie's shoulders, and her small, red-brown eyes took a malign gleam. Nevertheless, she broke into a song and led the way through the long central hall.

We followed her waving muslin flounces and daintily clicking heels to the end of the hall and into the red parlor, a room with heavy crimson velvet and mahogany furnishings, from which, on the right, a door and window opened into a small winter conservatory, now swept, and garnished with willow seats.

Mrs. Greenleaf drew a key from her pocket. She unlocked a pair of glass doors which led from the conservatory into a space covering seventy-five by thirty-five feet of ground and enclosed by a high, vine-covered lattice. As the doors fell open, I exclaimed at the beauty before me. An impression of *bizarrerie* affected my

nerves in a puzzling way, but a somewhat practiced eye soon told me in what the unusual effect consisted.

There were plants blooming in August which we look for only in June. There were flowers familiar as belonging to foreign climes, and others whose type I had never seen—of which I had never even read. Stranger still than this was the fact that every flower in those masses of bloom was of some shade of purple. The coloring ranged from delicate mauve to the deep hue of the passion flower, and the mingling of perfumes was indescribable. Several trees and rustic seats dotted a circular moss-like center.

Upon entering the garden, Mrs. Greenleaf walked with evident haste towards a heavy iron bench standing between two evergreens some distance from the house. As she seated herself, Gertie, still loquacious, approached the same bench. To my surprise, the elder lady threw up her hands, fairly pushing the girl back and cried:

"No — no, Gertie! Not here! Sit over there!"

The girl bit her lip and obeyed, saying to me in a flippant aside, "A faux pas!" But I saw a dark red wave surge across her neck and cheek.

Mrs. Greenleaf's face at once showed entreating apology. She began quickly to make plans for the next time Gertie should come to the house.

Kingdon did not seem aware of this by-play. He presently, without excuse, took himself and his everlasting cigar out of the only exit from the garden, a gate in the lattice leading to the front of the house. Through the vines, I saw him at the foot of the terrace, going towards the village. He was supposed to peruse "sealed briefs with winged haste," but I afterwards learned that his three decades of life had been chiefly devoted to becoming expert with the billiard cue.

With Kingdon's departure, Mrs. Greenleaf instantly arose.

"The dew is falling," she said, in a dull, weary tone. "Let us go into the red parlor." She led the way with a step that faltered less from age, apparently, than from some failure of motive power.

During the few minutes that I remained in the parlor, I received an impression that caused me to sit for some hours by my darkened bedroom window.

I had stood looking over some curious specimens, evidently col-

lected by the late Mr. Greenleaf. Gertie, who had been surveying herself in a mirror, moved to the back of Mrs. Greenleaf's chair. She put her arms about the elder lady's neck, her hands falling well down over the bosom of the shining black silk. I turned suddenly, and was transfixed by the expression on Mrs. Greenleaf's face, which had grown deathly pale. Her eyes rested upon Gertie's hands with a look of absolute horror. She seemed to shrink back, as if to avoid the contact. So absorbed was the good lady that my presence was evidently forgotten. With an effort, I resumed the study of the specimens, and when I turned later, to say good night, Gertie was teasing the house-cat, while Mrs. Greenleaf was sorting some wools. The face of the latter showed only calm weariness.

On the following day, in a casual chat with old Mary, I was informed that Gertie had been Mr. Greenleaf's ward, lived now with a married sister, but had always been at home in the Greenleaf house, often, during her early girlhood, staying there for months together.

Several times within the week, returning from my bug-hunting, I strolled across the front lawn with the thought of entering the garden to have a closer view of its rare blossoms. The gate I invariably found locked. Trying the way through the conservatory, in Mrs. Greenleaf's absence, I found the glass doors also locked. Finally, going home one day in the late forenoon, I went directly to the red parlor, hoping to find my hostess and gain the desired privilege. There were movements in Mrs. Greenleaf's room, which opened back from the parlor. As she did not appear, after a moment's waiting, I stepped into the conservatory.

The glass doors were open. A wave of heavy perfume and the delicate amethyst ripple of the breeze-blown flowers intoxicated me. I walked hastily into the midst of the purple glory. The sun was hot, and I took hold of one end of the iron bench, with the intention of moving it into the shade. Its legs were deeply imbedded in the soil, as if from years of standing in one place. Being an athletic youth, I had no idea of being foiled so easily. I seized the arm with vigor to give a decided wrench, when I heard a scream. Looking up, I saw Mrs. Greenleaf running towards me, waving her hands frantically.

"No — no!" she cried. "Don't move it — don't step —" She sank gasping upon the bench. Seeing my bewilderment, she gave me a deprecatory look.

"You must pardon me," she panted. "I am very nervous. My — my husband placed this bench here — he often used to sit here — I don't like to have it moved."

The deceased Mr. Greenleaf's portrait hung over the dining-room mantel, but his widow had not seemed to regard it with unusual sentiment. The good man was never mentioned except in the most casual way. Why then, this extreme emotion over one only of a thousand things he must have touched and placed during his life!

The lady recovered herself quickly as I blundered an apology. She talked with enthusiasm about the flowers and her method of obtaining varieties. For many years, it appeared, she had given all her leisure time to a thorough study of hybridism.

So absorbed were we in the subject, that we forgot the hour until a mocking voice called from the conservatory:

"Isn't there to be any dinner in this house? I call this cold hospitality!"

Something like a shudder went over my companion's frame. Gertie stood between the glass doors. She was smart and fresh, in a flowered, be-ribboned organdie, and her long, red curl was smoothly turned. Her whole appearance suggested an unusual occasion!

As we entered the red parlor, Kingdon came through the hall and threw himself upon the broad velvet sofa. While Mrs. Greenleaf and I resumed our discussion, Gertie fluttered about restlessly, perpetually smiling and humming, with the air of having thoughts too pleasant to impart.

Suddenly she wheeled about, exclaiming:

"Listen, people! I might as well tell you, for I can't keep it secret. Look here!"

She held up her left hand, upon which glittered a jewel. There was an instant's silence. She laughed nervously and her face grew darkly red.

"Don't you know what it means? I am engaged to Charlie Brandon!"

Kingdon sprang upright.

"A good thing, too! I congratulate you, Gertie!"

The girl bowed mockingly.

"Much obliged, I'm sure!" she snapped caustically.

Mrs. Greenleaf had neither moved nor spoken. Her face was ashen. Her lips trembled without sound. Her figure seemed to shrink, to stoop. It was evident that the poor woman had received a cruel blow.

The dinner bell rang, with the irony of the commonplace in tragic moments. Mrs. Greenleaf arose slowly and motioned us towards the dining-room. She walked into her bedroom, closed the door, and from then until the last terrible night I did not see her again.

Both garden and red parlor were closed during the few days that followed. Kingdon and I dined in oppressive silence. I caught brief glimpses of Gertie and an old neighbor slipping through the hall towards Mrs. Greenleaf's room. Mary gave me daily news of the poor lady, always of the most lugubrious character. There was not a doubt that Mrs. Greenleaf was sinking under the weight of a grief whose source baffled me.

The solution of the problem came, a week later, in a hot, sultry twilight, through no effort of mine.

Crossing the lawn early in the evening, I saw the gate of the purple garden standing open. Hoping for news of my hostess, I laid my net and specimens under the porch vines and went through the garden into the conservatory, where I seated myself quietly in a corner to wait until some one should come from Mrs. Greenleaf's room. Instantly, I heard the low, distinct voices of Kingdon and Gertie quite near me within the red parlor. My entrance had evidently been unobserved.

"You can see for yourself," said the girl sharply, in tense, jerky sentences. "The end is bound to come — tonight! We must be with her — alone! One cannot tell what she will say. Even this afternoon she wandered. I had to get the neighbors out of the room. We must say that she is better — must be kept quiet. It will seem natural — I asked Mrs. Bellamy not to come back at all — told her she ought to rest. Where is old Mary?"

"In her room. She will never bother — sleeps like a rock."

An instant's pause, then Gertie fairly hissed:

"What about that scientific idiot? Where is he?"

This was not flattering to me, but I bore it cheerfully, thinking more about my chances of escape.

Kingdon answered gruffly:

"Oh, he is out gathering bats. He will not come in until late, and his room is too far away for him to hear anything."

They moved their position slightly. I feared their vision might command the glass doors.

Darkness was quite fallen. A sluggish breeze brought a heavy, languorous breath from the garden. Gertie sighed impatiently.

"Oh, those hateful flowers!" she murmured. "Their perfume sickens me. If your mother——"

She sprang to her feet with a hoarse "Look — look!"

Kingdon cried in a muffled voice, "Mother!"

So startled was I, that I found myself standing before the window, gazing transfixed at the scene in the red parlor, which was lighted by a burning candle in Mrs. Greenleaf's hand.

The sick woman staggered through the open door of her bedroom. Her gaunt features were marked by death, but her eyes burned with life in the candle gleam. She moved resolutely to the sofa, and sank, breathing fearfully, into a reclining position. Gertie caught the candle and placed it back of the group.

"The end has come," gasped the invalid. "It must be done — at once! I will not go into eternity with this weight on my soul. You shall be married — now — before I die! Go for the Dominie, Kingdon. I shall hold out till you come. Go — go!"

"Mother! You are wild!" cried Kingdon, "It is out of the question——"

"Dear Mrs. Greenleaf," interposed Gertie's voice, so even, cold and hard it made my flesh creep. "You are making yourself miserable over a thing long past, of which nobody knows. Kingdon and I don't want to marry each other. Why not let us live out our lives in peace?"

Something in the voice seemed to convey to the dying woman the futility of her desire. She threw up her arms in her agony.

"Live in peace! Have I had peace these nine years? Think of the awful nights! Not one has passed but I have lived over

that horrible time — oh God — that horrible time ! I see it in the darkness ——"

"Damn it !" burst from Kingdon. "You forget yourself—"

Mrs. Greenleaf broke into quivering, hysterical sobbing. Gertie moved quickly to the head of the sofa. Her face was in shadow, but her hands crept slowly down over the sick woman's neck.

"You are raving, Mrs. Greenleaf," said the cold voice. "Be careful what you say."

The invalid started fiercely to a sitting posture. "Don't touch me ! Don't dare to touch me with those horrible hands ! I've endured them for years, those hateful caresses, in the hope that you would marry Kingdon and make part of the wrong right. I've kept silent — I've lived the lie along with you — but that I had any part in what you did with those abominable hands of yours, I deny, and God is my witness ! You shall not touch me when I am dying. Keep away from me !"

"Get the morphine !" said Gertie between her teeth.

With an incredible firmness, Mrs. Greenleaf arose to her feet.

"You will give me no morphine. I'm at the end now. The world shall know all before I die. You shall not deceive a good man and marry him with that blackness in your heart !" She walked to the hall door.

"Stop her !" commanded Gertie. Kingdon sprang forward, caught his mother and dragged her violently to the sofa. With a shrieking gasp, she collapsed and shrank into the cushions. There was a horribly familiar sound, then silence.

Gertie's skirts rustled. Presently she said, coolly:

"She's dead. You stay here — I'll run for Mrs. Bellamy."

She moved to the hall door. On her face was an evil smile that seemed to deepen and deepen, cutting grooves into her hard beauty and defacing her soul.

As I dashed through the awful garden, which had now become a place of horror, Kingdon Greenleaf threw his arms over his head and fell to his knees with a cry that is still in my ears.

The Vision in the Desert.*

BY JUDITH GRAVES WALDO.

WHEN Joe Derby's marriage with Dorinda was but ten days away he came down the dump trail to Slocom's cabin after his last load, with a week's leave and a pass on the stage for "J. Derby and wife" in his pocket. The men on the night shift, coming out from the grub-house with their pails, did not greet him with the usual rough joke, but nodded silently and turned back to look after him as he swung down the trail.

"I'd like to be at the telling!" Phil Kerby said with brutal curiosity.

"But a good pace off at the shooting, I'm thinking," sneered the foreman.

Joe shook his fist with a grin at the Chinese cook, watching from the kitchen, and waved his hat to Cooley's baby, drumming to him from the cabin window. Then he flung into Slocom's little white-washed cabin, shaking it with his great tread.

"Dorinda!" he shouted. He had the pass for "J. Derby and wife" in his hand. And then Slocom came in from the kitchen, followed by his wife with a tin of biscuits, and tried to tell him and could not, and sobbed against the door-post; and Dorinda's dry-eyed little mother said that Dorinda had run off with the hardware-drummer who had been about camp for two weeks past. When she had said it she sat down and trotted the biscuit-tin on her knee. She did not look at Joe; she looked at the biscuits. Joe looked at the biscuits, too. There were fifteen in all,—three rows,—five in each row. Joe counted them carefully the second time to make sure. Then he turned toward the outer door and Dorinda's father cried out:

"Don't you shoot no one, boy! Shooting won't help you!"

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Joe went down the straggling row of cabins under the yellowing cottonwoods, and at each door-way, when he passed, they came to stare and wonder. Two men, tilted in front of the bunk-house door, went hastily inside as he came, but were out again when he had passed, and watched him go down the ravine and take the trail across the red hills toward the open desert.

"Plumb locoed!" they said, and went back to their bench — and the camp was very still that night.

But Joe was not "locoed." All his rough, swaggering life he had teamed across the desert, and its drouth and the terror of its driving sand-storms, its floods, and then the quick-coming flowers, were all his days many months of the year. And by night, camped under its sky, the majesty of its vastness and desolation, the wonder of its loneliness, had born in Joe an unconscious knowledge of its strength — the "feel" of the desert. And this led him now. Where the red trail met the well traveled road he left it and kept along the base of the hills until there were no more human way-marks and then he struck out into the desert, and the wide, calm desert night moved down to him. Straight ahead through the low cactus and grease-wood he went, yet picking his way with a certain heedful care. A cactus-wren fluttered up from the brush, crying shrilly, and Joe stopped to see why she cried when the shadows were over everything. It was a lamenting cry and troubled Joe; but, seeing no cause for it, he strode ahead again. And then a quick wind brought the far-off roar of the stamp-mill, where Joe hauled, each day, the two loads of ore from the mine. With the swerve of the wind it was gone but, as though the familiar noise had brought him back to conscious life again, Joe suddenly knew the meaning of what they had told him in the cabin and, without a sound, he dropped to the ground and lay face down among the still, gray shadows. On the red hills a coyote cried, and from the far, dry bed of the river one answered him, and there were gray shadows that moved across the gray shadows that were still.

While the night was deepest Joe got to his feet and stumbled up and down between two great beds of cactus. It was then that the vision began to take shape before him. It grew from the depth of his own privation — crept — felt its way — and with

the sudden dawn in the sky it was very clear before him, gleaming in the colors of the desert morning. He spoke aloud, answering the vision in his own words:

"You bet I'll stand by you, you little thing — God!" The sun was on the rim of the far desert sea. Joe stretched his arms wide to it, welcoming the reality it brought out of the hidden things.

It was time for work: Joe was away by the trail he had come. Up fluttered the cactus-wren, complaining loudly now, with a peevish twitter between each shrill lament.

"What ails you?" Joe stopped to hunt through the brush for a reason. There it was at the foot of a tall cane-cactus. Someone had pulled the nest from its fastenings and dropped it without heed. Joe replaced the nest carefully, and the few unbroken eggs.

"There, there," he soothed, "make the best of it — next year's coming." But all day long through the jangle and jar and strain of the great ore-wagon, Joe heard the lament and peevish twitter of the cactus-wren.

Joe Derby lived at the Slocoms' now, and his rude compassion eased the two lives made almost desolate by Dorinda's flight. The man with whom she had gone was known among the camps as a "light-weight," and someone said there was a wife in a northern town. But no one heard of Dorinda, and in Slocom's cabin no one spoke of her. In Joe's heart no shame touched her. There was only blame for himself that he had not understood, and a dumb, aching hatred for the man who had. And Joe always watched for Dorinda — listened for her. That she would one day need him and that he must be ready, became the creed of his life. So strong was this faith that he always scanned the far stretch of desert as his team crawled down the grade to the mill, and any object moving on it held him expectant. But months passed and Dorinda never came, nor word nor rumor of her. And Joe began to think that no matter how great her necessity, she would never come back to the camp,— that she might be suffering that need now,— but where? The restlessness of waiting settled on him and he could not stand the woful monotony of those days of inaction on the heavy, slow-moving

ore-wagon. If he were away some rumor might reach him — or could she come more easily if he were not there?

So when the foreman came to his wagon wheel as Joe flung out the long jerk-line after the last load, and said:

"Want a job away for a few weeks, Joe?" Joe knew the moment's uplift that comes from direct answer to prayer. He flung a leg over the pommel of the saddle and slouched forward.

"What's the word?" he said.

"Well, it ain't 'mum,' I guess, Joe. The Concern wants to send some men into Death Valley,— they think they've got it this time,— to bring away some ore for a milling trial, and they want the best man on the desert for guide service. They sent up to me and I said: 'Joe.' Will you do it?"

"How many?"

"Five. Two experts and three diggers. You'll do guide duty and look after the animals."

"Team?"

"No. Saddle-back."

"Mules," said Joe, looking out across the red hills, "and pack-jacks. When do they light?"

"Two days. You'll do it?"

"Yep," and Joe swung down from the saddle and began unhitching his team.

In another week Joe's little party was well over the border of the low, arid strip of land to the north of the Mojave Desert, known as Death Valley, where countless men have lost their lives searching for the gold which its crumbling hills contain; and entire emigrant trains have perished, striving to push through its bewildering, waterless waste on their way to the promised land. The prospectors made permanent camp among some hills to the north of the traveled trail, where there were a few water holes and a little forage for the animals.

While the experts directed the work, ground their samples, and operated the small assay furnace, Joe, after tending to his animals, went on long prospecting tours of his own, with a small flag flying from the highest point of the camp for a guide in case of difficulty; for no one better understood the wisdom of caution.

"I'm laying out the country," Joe said, laughing shortly. But

the expeditions were a vain attempt to overcome the restlessness again dogging his moments of inactivity.

"What good does this do me? I rushed into this too quick," he fretted, as the mule crunched over the hot sand. "Better have thrown up my job and gone to the towns, I'm thinking now. I'll never get a trace in this direction and I'm too far off to — but I was crazy when the chance came, maybe — Oh, I'll throw up my job when I get back, even if I did set up the Concern's first monument."

The way was growing rocky now, and Joe got down from the saddle and led his mule through a pass in the hills where the cañon walls were sheer, and the narrow way offered some shade from the consuming sun. And there in the pulsing heat waves, just ahead, was the vision. Joe stood, not breathing, with wide eyes and tense, expectant body.

"Where?" His voice was a whisper; and the vision was gone. Joe put his head against the animal's hot side and waited till the strength came back to his great limbs.

"That's never come since — God! Oh, where?" He stood upright and went slowly, almost cautiously, up the narrowing pass, and, at the rattle of a sliding stone, he flung about, looking expectantly around — but there was no one. He looked for foot-marks, but the rocky soil did not hold them, and he had not noticed down below in the sand. If there had been any, he assured himself, he would have seen them. Just ahead a bit of color flashed against the dulness of the rocks. It was a strip of pink calico fastened among a pile of stones such as prospectors leave as a claim monument, and Joe saw where the fingers had scratched the earth in gathering up the stones.

"Looks like a woman's dress, a man don't wear that kind of shirt," — Joe could see the pink frills about Dorinda's throat. He was searching again for footprints, but found nothing. The way divided here, and a cañon led on each side of one of those common, desert formations, a hill of packed sand, wind-worn into a weird, fantastic shape. To Joe it looked like a great hand pointing upward, and heightened in him the sensibility of the nearness of supernatural things.

"That strip," he whispered low, "leads through the right-

hand trail, and there'll be another on the other side." He moved on past the great hand, and there it was, the strip of pink hanging limp against the rocky monument. And there the rocks gave way more to the sand, and Joe found the foot-print — a woman's. He knelt long by it and then rose and went ahead with a white, awed face.

The mule snorted suddenly and pulled back. From behind a jut of rock a buzzard staggered into the air, and then another. Joe pulled the mule on, and with set teeth passed the rock. A third buzzard turned an insolent head from where it perched on the almost stripped carcass of a mule, the dry bones of whose mate bleached near by. Joe saw the tracks of coyotes here, and their trail led up the cañon. And now the prints of a woman's boot were moving, both up and down. He could easily trace them where the drift of sand covered the rocky out-crop, and sometimes a coyote-track all but obliterated the woman's. And then he found the man's foot-prints.

"*He* limped," whispered Joe, "an' she helped him — he went back — they came in by the other pass. She's gone out this way for help, past them pink strips — and he's ahead here. *She's too late.*" Joe urged his mule ahead now, always whispering: "Those tracks may be a year old, but that calico ain't, nor yet those mules."

Now the trail lay in and out among crumbling boulders and huge, grotesque sand creatures, and for nearly a mile Joe pushed on, led by the cruelly fresh coyote tracks; and underneath, — never above, — were the prints of the woman's boot and that of the man whom she helped. Ahead, on a high sand shaft, standing quite alone in a widening part of the cañon, sat a buzzard, and it watched something in the cañon. And then Joe was upon it suddenly — a small camp; the blackened stones of a cooking place, empty tin cans, a canteen flung far out on the sand, a wagon, its contents scattered about and its tongue used to support a bit of tent-cloth stretched from boulder to boulder. And that was all. All that he could see; for as he stood watching that tent-cloth with a horror that made anticipation barren, Joe was conscious that a sound, which, in the fulness of his mysticism seemed as much a sign from another world as the hand pointing

upward, was beating in the air, in the ground under his feet, through the cañon walls, through the weird shapes looming around him. It was not loud but full and persistent, a living sound that quickened the desolate stillness. Joe stooped and slipped the rein of his staring mule about a rock and moved toward the tent-cloth. A coyote slunk away from between the wheels of the wagon, so much a color with the sand against which it had crouched that Joe had not seen it. Joe watched it disappear up the cañon and then strode across the sand and lifted the limp tent-cloth. The man lying there was almost naked, stretched out on his back with arms tossed above his head, and the sharp bones pierced the shrunken skin. His face was bloated and blotched with heat, and from his swollen, purple lips came deep, struggling breaths. Joe dropped the cloth and staggered to a near-by rock. He held his clenched hands down hard between his knees: "God Almight! God Almighty!" he groaned, and his own face grew bloated and blotched like the man's under the tent-cloth. The reality was with him now, and his fingers quivered and shut and opened, struggling for control, and the great breaths throbbed through him as they had throbbed through the ground and the weird shapes of the cañon.

"God Almighty!" he groaned again. Not dead? Not dead? It never meant I'd got to do this! I can't — by Hell, I can't!" And then he stood up trembling, with a stinging sweat dripping from him, and cursed.

From under the tent-cloth came a long, sobbing wail. Joe stood but one irresolute second, then sprang for his canteen, lifted the tent-cloth, and knelt by the man on the ground. He wet the handkerchief he wore about his neck and bathed the man's head and face and squeezed some drops between his swollen lips. He got out his whiskey, emptied a little into the flask cup, filled it with water, and poured it between the man's lips. It was swallowed. Joe waited. He thought the breathing was a little easier. He lifted the man and carried him out into the shadow of a huge rock. The sun was going down and the air was cooler. Joe poked about the wagon stuff, but found nothing. There was no trace of food or water in the camp. When he came to him again the man's eyes were open and he stared dully at Joe.

"Did she send you?" he muttered.

"Where did she go?" Joe stood over him, opening a can of tomatoes from his saddle-bag.

"She — didn't know — where — " the man rolled over on the ground and the heavy breathing began again. Joe propped him up against the wall.

"Try to sit up, man! It'll kill you to lie like that!"

"Oh, let me — sleep!" he groaned.

"I'll let you sleep. Tell me first where she went and if she had grub and water?" Joe shook him roughly.

"Wake up, I say! Do you want her to die out there in that hell?" Joe poured a little more whiskey and water down his throat and waited again. The cooler air, too, was helping. Joe bathed the man's head and neck with wet hands and then pressed the temples gently.

"Did she have any grub or water?"

"A little — I had to have — "

"When did she go?"

"So long — oh — long — two nights — two days — "

"Did she know where to go?"

"Where?" The man roused a little. "Why, we've been lost for days. The mules died — she said she'd keep going."

"Why didn't you go?"

"I've been so sick — sick — and she gave me only so little to drink and eat. I ate all she left and drank all the water when she'd gone — I couldn't help it — " the man fell to whimpering and then pitched forward on his face. Joe hauled him up against the rock again, and fed him from the tomato can.

"It's the heat and sickness that's done you. You try to sit my mule now and I'll get you to camp." But when Joe tried to lift him into the saddle he cried piteously, and begged to be allowed to sleep. It was a long ride to camp and the way rough. Joe knew they would not miss him one night and he would make camp in the early morning. He took down the tent-cloth, rolled it, and propped the man against it and tried, as best he could, to ease the poor broken skin — it could not be called flesh. He found a tin dish and gave the mule some of the water — hardly a cupful. As the light dimmed he climbed upon

the wagon seat and watched. The man moved about on his rough pillow, just below him, and sat up, staring at him.

"What — what in hell — what are you doing there?" His voice croked suddenly. Joe knew that it was another man speaking out of that miserable shrunken body than had answered his questions. The man was afraid.

"Dry up and go to sleep! No one's going to hurt you!"

The man lay down again but Joe knew he was watching. The moon came out, big and white against the deep night, and Joe could see two coyotes squatted a little distance from the camp, not more conscious of him than the man, watching, watching from the roll of tent-cloth. The mule, tied at the tail-board, fell to startled braying now and again and Joe got down and petted him and found a few oats in his saddle-bag and fed them to him from his palm. The man sat up, cautiously, and peered after him as he moved about.

"Joe — Joe Derby?" he called softly. Joe turned to him.

"What?"

"*Are* you Joe Derby?"

"Yes. Get to sleep."

"Where did you come from?"

"I just happened along."

"Were you — looking for — me?"

"I just happened, I tell you! I'm camped near here."

"I didn't know you at first," the man pleaded. "I never saw you but once — on your team — and when I saw you on the wagon there — I knew you." Joe came and rolled the tent-cloth again and tried to hollow out the sand into some place of comfort for the poor racked body, which was trembling now, and the eyes were fearful of him.

"I tried to go a little way — I was afraid to stay alone," he whimpered again — "but I couldn't. She helped me back here. Do you think anything has happened to her out there?"

"No!" said Joe savagely, "she's all right!"

The man pulled at his sleeve: "Do you know who I am?"

"I know all right."

"Sure?"

"Yes."

"You wouldn't — I'm nearly dead — you didn't come — you won't kill me?"

Joe laughed shortly. "Don't look much like it. Go to sleep."

"They always said you'd kill — me. Dorinda — I"

"Damn you! Shut up that fool talk. I'm here to see you through this. As soon as there's light I'll get you to camp — an' someone'll find her. Now, dry up, I say!"

The man's fingers closed on Joe's shirt sleeve and he slept. Joe sat staring straight ahead at the cañon wall. Two days! — if he could believe that poor brain-racked thing — and his own camp but ten miles away! If she knew, or struck the right trail — how could she know it! Something might lead her to it, and she could make the border station in a day and a half and help could get back soon — might come at any time. But could she be wasted — gone — like — ? Joe set his teeth hard and listened with such dread and fear lest the sound he prayed for would not come, that the least noise blared loud in his ears. Was that a voice — far off — calling? Joe was on his knees, with strained eyes, and ears keyed to the slightest breath — and the long wailing cry of the coyote broke over the night. Joe sat down again, letting his right arm droop beside him, not to disturb the clinging hand on the sleeve. A long time he sat in this way. The moon had gone behind the cañon. Joe rose softly to his knees. He knew that someone had come up, noiselessly, to where the tent-cloth had hung and was looking at him. Would she — He turned about. There was no one there. A stone fell and he crouched, listening — they were coming now! Oh, God, if she — The mule plunged at his tie-rope, snorting, and Joe sprang up and yelled:

"Here — here — halloo! Come on!" "O — come on — on on," it rang off down the pass. There was no answering shout, and Joe knelt by the man again, who was crying that he was afraid to be alone.

And the night passed.

Joe saddled the mule and left a note nailed to the wagon-tongue, giving directions, in case Dorinda should come with help, that he would return to the first monument at the mouth of the pass by noon. Then he roused the sleeping man, who babbled

names over and over again and begged Joe to tell him — to tell him — to tell him — Joe gave him the last swallows of water and the remaining tomatoes and lifted him almost tenderly into the saddle. The sleep had strengthened the man a little and the hope of comfort ahead heartened him and he was able to keep in the saddle with the help of Joe's arm. There was light enough to travel by now, and Joe set out, walking by the man's side. When they reached the monument at the entrance to the pass, Joe tied another note to the strip of pink calico, saying he would return by noon, that the man was safe, and to wait for him there. As they came down into the desert he watched carefully for the foot-prints, and, leaving the mule, cast about for some time to find their direction. There it was! She had gone, true as a needle, to the beaten trail! She must have struck it five miles below his own camp! He might have found her any day that he had been idly casting about those very trails! Joe hurried along now, and the mule, headed toward home, needed no urging. Only the poor, weak, whimpering thing on the saddle begged for rest and water. But the wind was rising, hot and sucking, tossing the sand and fine alkali dust into tiny spirals, and Joe broke into a run, knowing how soon those foot-prints might be swept away. Before the sun was well up he could see the flutter of the little flag above the camp, and soon after they panted in, stampeding the animals, nosing about for scraps, and bringing the men running from the works.

"Take care of this — the heat's got him — keep him bolstered — don't let him down flat — he's been lost for days." Joe was filling two canteens while he gave directions, and the men took the poor babbling thing from the mule. "Saddle up that black mule while I get some grub — there's another out there in that Godless waste — one of you strike the trail for the border station while I follow the track over yonder — she may be turned off, and this wind — "

"My God — a woman?" a man cried.

"Yes," said Joe, "a woman," and he swung into the saddle and cantered out of camp.

The wind was scudding in little gusts across the plains when Joe left the monument, satisfied that no one had passed

there. He slowed down, for he knew that neither he nor the mule could go far at that pace. He followed the foot-prints now, sometimes losing them and casting ahead and about till he found them again; and still they pointed toward the main trail. He was close to it, — not farther than a mile, — when the foot-marks turned suddenly and went off across the plains at right angles to the first direction. Joe jumped down and walked. The wind had covered all traces for some distance, and it was only when he found a scrap of pink calico caught on a bush, that he was sure that he had not quite lost the trail. And so, walking and riding, losing the poor, bewildered foot-steps, then finding them again, Joe followed up the day to its close, and, the fitful wind having died down, he lay that night by his mule but was on again the first moment the light let him take up the trail. And late in the morning he found her. She was near a little hill which rose abruptly from the plain, and he could see the pink of her dress as she sat in a narrow line of shade made by an overhanging rock. And then she saw him and started up, crying out something again and again. Joe's heart beat so loud that he could not hear what she said, for now something else was happening. He got down from the saddle and went swiftly to meet her, with an awful fear taking the best life out of him.

"For the love of God!" she was crying. "For the love of God!" and then she stopped, staring with wild, terrified eyes at the face of him.

"For the love of God!" Joe pleaded, stretching out his hands to her.

It was not Dorinda.

"I — I'm lost," faltered the woman.

"I've been hunting you," Joe's hands were still stretched out.

"There's a man — "

"We found him."

"O God — God." The woman dropped to the ground in sudden weakness, and Joe knelt beside her with the canteen and food.

"Go easy, child, go easy, now. When did your grub give out? You plucky — there — let me put a little on your head and face."

"Was he—"

"He's all right. They've got him right comfortable down at camp. You were close to us—then you—you've been going up and down since."

"I got so turned around."

"Yes, poor girl—poor little—"

"I just thought to send someone back to him."

"He told me."

"I thought if I kept a-going—"

"One goes 'round and 'round here, sometimes. Can you get into the saddle now?"

"You frightened me so—your face—at first." She still looked fearfully at him.

"I—expected I'd—I'd find a woman. You're such a little—girl." Joe lifted her into the saddle.

"I'm his wife," she said simply.

Joe looked at her. Then he picked up the rein and walked forward beside the mule. The heat was fearful, but neither spoke of it. There was no talk between them, for Joe could not, and the little, wondering woman understood she must not. When the sun was low again Joe fell back beside her.

"Tell me about it—will you?"

"We were just coming through with his samples—he travels—it's hardware—and we got into that place. He'd been so sick. The mules died. They made such awful noises I took them way off so he wouldn't hear—and they died; so I had to walk when I went for help, and it takes so long to walk, and my feet hurt some—and I knew how bad he was feeling. I walked about at night some—he hated to be left alone—and there were things that came—I know—I was afraid, too, sometimes." Joe put his big hand over the two little claw-like things on the pommel of his saddle.

"Don't you fret," he said, and she smiled at him.

"You—were just—married?"

"Oh, my, no. Three years." Joe walked ahead again and about midnight they camped. The mule was very restive and broke into great discordant noises at the sound of the gurgling water when Joe tipped the canteen for the woman to drink.

"*They* made that noise — I *had* to take them away," she whispered. Joe gave the poor beast his own portion of the water and he became quiet. He fixed the saddle for the woman to rest against — the best he could do for her.

"When will we be there?" she whispered again.

"Sometime to-morrow."

"I ain't complaining," she said quickly.

"Complaining — you're the pluckiest!" Joe went over and stretched himself near the mule, but he did not sleep. Once the little woman sat up and cried out shrilly:

"Is anyone there?" And Joe came and sat by the saddle.

"Yes, I'm here."

"Oh, do you think he's —"

"He's all right. He asked me if I thought you were all right, too, and you see —"

"Did he?" And she lay down again and slept.

It was night before they reached camp, the poor fagged mule could but just keep on and Joe was weary and foot worn. Only the slight little thing on the saddle was eager and alert with hope. The men came stumbling up from their bunks to meet them when Joe hallooed from the hill, and someone brought a lantern.

"Joe?"

"Yes. I've got her." Joe lifted her down and held her gently for she would have fallen.

"Is he —?"

Then one of the experts said: "He's — quiet now — asleep. You'd better not see him to-night. Rest first. There's a tent ready —" Joe led her to the tent where there was a rude bunk. She sat on the edge of it and ate and drank what Joe gave her in an awed, frightened way and the men stood about the tent-flap asking if they could do anything.

"Now, sleep, little child. You're the pluckiest the dearest ever saw. And don't — just sleep! — and I'm right here — we all are," Joe said as her eyes besought him. He left her then and went to stretch upon the ground at the edge of the camp, and the men ministered to him.

"When did he go out?" Joe asked, at last.

"Right after you left. We buried him a bit after noon. Will she take on?"

"She? Oh, she knows! You didn't fool her no more than me."

"Confound you, Joe, for making this a rescue camp!" The expert flung a tin can at a foraging mule.

"When can you pull out of this?"

"Three days more,— the ore is sacked,— if you don't hunt up any more subjects for hospital aid."

When Joe came up from tending his mules in the morning the woman met him quietly in mid-camp.

"When?" she asked, her own voice striking down her brave attempt. Joe turned away to look across the wavering sea of heat.

"Just after I left — three days ago."

"Can you tell me — anything?"

"He knew we'd gone for you,— another man was looking, too, — he got back two days ago. He knew we'd find you. He did not suffer, you know. That was all past."

"May I go — where they've put him?" Joe thought of the grave piled high with stones, as graves of that region must needs be, and shook his head.

"I — know — what desert graves are like." She was trying to speak steadily.

"Come on, then." And Joe went with her over the hill, helping her as she slipped and stumbled on the loose stones. And there he left her, and went with the mules to bring in the wagon from the desert pass, and whatever of value he could find scattered about the camp. He hurried over what he had to do, for everywhere he could see the limp tent-cloth, and the sound of deep, struggling breaths throbbed through everything.

"The heat's gone to my head. I'll get out of this." But he stopped near the mouth of the pass and pulled out the strips of pink calico from among the stones and thrust them into his shirt.

"I was so sure it was — it almost makes 'em hers," and Joe drove on to the camp.

Two days later the ore-sacks were packed and the outfit stored

away, and the little train set out toward civilization, Joe riding by the loaded wagon, and the little woman in the tattered, crumpled, pink calico gown holding the reins and turning back to look through big tears at the pile of stones on the barren hillside.

"He was so afraid when I left him alone in the cañon — it seems like I can't go now — and leave him." A sob caught her and she turned resolutely to the mules. It was the nearest to "taking on" that she had come and Joe reined in beside the wheel and showed her how he managed fourteen mules with a jerk-line. And by and by she wiped the tears off her face with the skirt of her calico gown and said:

"I can't think why I was so frightened at you when you came and found me."

"You're not afraid of me any more?"

"Oh, my, no!"

"That's lucky." Joe smiled at her, "for I'm going to take you to your folks when I get this outfit to a place where they can get on without me."

The thin little face quivered again.

"I ran away with him when we were married."

"Then they'll be gladder than ever to get you back again."

She shook her head. "Do you think that?"

"Oh, I know it!"

"Why?"

Joe flecked the mules with his lariat.

"I — I know of a little girl, once, that — she went off with a man and I know how glad — her people would be to get her back."

"And didn't she ever go?"

"Not yet."

The woman looked about to see that no one was by to overhear. Then she slipped to the edge of the seat nearest Joe.

"One — she was good, too — went off with him, once — not *me* — *we* were married. He — he wasn't always good." Then she fussed with the reins in her lap and Joe thought she would never speak again, and his hands twitched on the pommel of the saddle. She looked up quickly:

"He was always good to me — I mean not good in — other things. And that girl found out about me. He hadn't told her, because — because she was good, I guess, — and she left him right off, but she wouldn't ever go back to her folks."

Joe turned to her but she still fussed with the reins in her lap and the mules plodded along in the wake of the pack-train.

"Where did she go?"

"She's there — where my folks are — working."

"How did you know?"

"I — I heard about it and I asked him. He told me then. She had a lover, too, and he was always afraid of him, so we stayed in the northern counties mostly. We'd only just come back." The little pinched face was growing more wistful.

"I always felt so bad because he did it. I wanted to go to her and ask her to go back to her folks. If I could get her to go back — " her face was pleading up to Joe's — "and they'd be happy, don't you think it would make it — make it — easier for *him*?"

Joe nodded, staring hard between his mule's flapping ears.

"And that man — her lover — he'd forgive her if he cared. When *he* told me — I — I — " Joe leaned down and closed the two little groping hands in his big one — "It makes a difference when you care, doesn't it?" she said. And Joe nodded again. Then he reined his mule back and fell in behind the wagon. He drew the two strips of pink calico from his shirt and laid them across the pommel of his saddle and looked at them through hot tears.

In the Valley of the Honeymakers.*

BY FRANK H. MELOON.

HEN that morning the launch, with gay streamers flying, had left the isle-dotted Bay of Panama, bearing its three occupants rapidly southward, an accident to the engine had delayed the party annoyingly, and while repairs were being made the leader, a tall, gaunt man, with hollow, brown cheeks, but with a wonderful air of mastery about him, swore industriously while his fellows watched him work, ready, but not needed, to assist. The smallest man of the party was a gaily-attired Mexican, and the other was an Englishman of the middle-sized, dogged type.

The launch was now, at nightfall, anchored among a mass of gorgeously verdant, palm-clad islands. The land breeze was blowing strongly, and the rich odor of the orange and other nectar-perfumed flowers was borne seaward with it. Ceylon, famed for its spicy odors, was no equal of this South American paradise.

"I believe your tale of the Valley of the Bees is pretty much exaggerated, Carlos," said the leader, on whose right cheek was a four-inch scar, caused, as he said, by the accidental discharge of a revolver held by one of the men in his gang on the big canal the Americans were excavating with an energy never before displayed in that section of the Western Hemisphere.

Reed, the Englishman, surmised that the discharge had not been entirely accidental, for the tall American was a man of powerful physique and quick passions, while the nondescript men beneath him were notoriously laggard in their inclination toward work. Williams, the big American, with his two companions, was now on a month's furlough from the labors of the big ditch.

In reply to the remark of the leader, the little Mexican grinned expressively, showing two irregular rows of yellow teeth, at the

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same time indicating by a gesture the direction in which lay the wonderful Valley of the Bees. The launch, overhung with a perfect barricade of netting, was mosquito-proof, and the three, smoking big, black cigars, lay on its deck in sprawling attitudes of ease. Above them twinkled the flame-bright southern constellations.

Williams drew a roughly-sketched chart from his pocket, and Reed dragged himself to a position where he too could study the cherished document. The two men examined it intently for several minutes without speaking, aided by the tiny flame of alternately lighted matches. Reed was the first to make a comment.

"If what Carlos here says is true, this valley, once conquered, will be of more value to us than the average gold mine."

"It's odd," mused the American aloud, "that the natives haven't been able to make anything of it. Carlos persists in declaring that the bees are in too great force for human strategy to overcome, but I guess a man who's handled bees, wild and otherwise, in the north, isn't going to let these honeymakers get ahead of him."

"Well," broke in Reed, "I think as you do that, now we're near the place, we'd best let the launch drift up stream with the tide, seeing the Mexican says it runs beyond this Valley. I've never hunted bees, but I take it we don't want to disturb them until we are ready for a master-stroke."

"Yes, in that respect they're like other game, as you'll see," replied Williams. "And you're likely to be thankful to-morrow that you've the protection of netting about you I contrived for this expedition."

The Mexican was already asleep, and the two Anglo-Saxons decided to follow his example.

The earliest rays of the sun were beginning to flood the horizon when the three occupants of the launch were aroused and brought to a sitting posture by a low, indistinct humming, gradually increasing in volume until it resembled nothing so much as the roar of the angry surf on a pebble-strewn shore. The Mexican shuddered and made the sign of the cross.

"The bees are setting out on their morning task!" he mumbled in his own tongue, while Williams and Reed looked at each other in silent wonder.

The tide was running in, so Williams opened an aperture in the netting, and drew up the anchor, allowing the launch to drift slowly with the stream. Occasionally great swarms of bees passed over them, generally flying, not with a direct flight, but in a thick, sinuous line, as if disturbed by the presence of the boat, against which lively instinct warned them. Gradually, however, the roaring sound died down to the fainter humming they had at first heard, when suddenly, as the launch drifted around a bend in the stream, the Mexican, his yellow face white with fear, pointed a trembling finger toward a deep valley, plainly visible because it ran at an angle to the river.

"The Valley of the Bees!" exclaimed Williams and Reed simultaneously.

It was indeed a marvelous spectacle that met their eyes. For a full mile the valley extended in an almost straight line. The perspective of vision was broken at not wholly irregular intervals by the grotesque forms of queer-shaped shrubbery ornamenting the valley-bottom, while along the sides of the vale grew the trees whose hoary trunks held unreckoned store of honey-treasure. Even from the distance of the launch, the sides of the nearer forest giants were seen to be streaming with an overflow of nectar, on which countless insects were feeding, not disturbed so long as they kept beyond the dead-line established by the swarming sentinels of the bee colonies.

The American's original plan had been, in case the Mexican's story proved true, as he supposed it would to some extent, to attack some of the outlying bee stores, get away with as much of the pillage as possible, and return better equipped for a larger store. The impossibility of carrying out this program unchanged now became evident, the simple reason being that the bees had planned their storehouses with an ingenuity well-nigh human. There were no outlying trees. Each separate trunk was as much a part of the whole as any other. The plan of defense was perfectly organized, yet even now Williams had no suspicion of the vast extent of this, nor any idea of returning empty handed. Against his better judgment, he dared hope that, if he attacked one tree, only the occupants of that particular trunk would turn out to resist him. Reed shared this hope. It was only the Mexi-

can who kept insisting in mumbling incoherency that "the bee devils fought in armies," meaning that one and all were united for the common defense.

The donning of the bee-fighters' cap-à-pie paraphernalia, after a couple of hours' careful watch and study, was the matter of only a few minutes. Carlos, the Mexican, swore by the saints that he would not leave the launch, and the others really cared nothing for his company except when he could serve them as guide. Now they had reached the goal, he would be as useful to them aboard the launch as anywhere else. Working the craft inshore as gently as possible, they quickly landed.

"Don't speak aloud," cautioned the American in a low whisper. "We must 'rile' them as little as we can till we have prospected."

The Englishman nodded assent, and they proceeded to make an inspection of the valley. Everywhere amazing stores of honey greeted their eyes. The odor of orange predominated so strongly that it was difficult to realize they were not in the midst of a many-acred grove of these fragrant blossoms. The multitude of bees was hardly in proportion to the volume of the honey-stores, a fact which greatly puzzled the veteran Williams.

But this was soon to be explained. In a careless moment, Reed slipped from a rock on which he was standing and thrust, in an effort to save himself, one hand into the midst of a curious black-and-gold bush, of which there were thousands in the valley. Instantly a startling metamorphosis took place. The bush became endowed with life and wings and sound. It rose belligerently into the air and swarmed about the two adventurers, striving desperately to make a successful sortie through their armor of netting. What they had mistaken for a bush was a solid mass of bees!

And now the valley grew dark with the shadow of their insect enemies. Innumerable bee-bushes, — some of them branchless and formed like the cacti of the plains, — moved toward them. The sound of their coming was like the continuous roar of a gale through the forest, and their bodies were so numerous as to entirely shut out the light of the sun, so that the two Anglo-Saxons stumbled about almost blindly, but still managing by desperate effort to keep each other in sight and to preserve the priceless sense of direction.

The netting contrived by the American was of aluminum wire, supported on a light frame, so that it stood out quite six inches from their bodies. Had it been of any vegetable material, the onslaught of the bees, coming in a solid, heavy body, with several pounds' force, must inevitably have broken it through, when those inside would have died a horrible death from the poisonous stings. As it was, no certainty of safety could be entertained, for the bees were examining in nervous rapidity every point of the netting with apparently human sagacity. It was in vain that thousands were trampled and killed beneath the feet of the two men; where thousands died, tens of thousands took their places.

As Williams, his arms extended before him with fingers touching, fought his way forward, his feet came in contact with a hard, round substance; he was able to see that it was a human skull, bleached to extraordinary whiteness, and he could make out other bones belonging to the body scattered about through the tangle of undergrass. A weaker man would have shuddered, holding the token a warning of his own fate, but Williams only gritted his teeth, more resolved than ever to make a conquest of the Valley of the Bees, though it now looked as if the two men would do well to escape with their lives.

Williams, a born woodsman, knew many tricks to which men have resorted when hard beset, and one of these he set about trying as soon as the two, with infinite difficulty, had gained the proper vantage point, having the wind and stream at their backs. The launch was nowhere to be seen, and both men swore savagely, having no doubt that Carlos, the cowardly Mexican, had made off with it to secure his own safety.

Through all the struggle, Williams had held in his hand a half dozen matches, part of the bee-hunter's necessary equipment. Before the couple lay a long stretch of bushes, which both had decided were akin to the gorse. The American recollected that green gorse burns like tinder, and, snapping a match with his thumb-nail, — a common but dexterous trick, — he let its flame flicker up through the aluminum gauze to lick the green leaf of the bush before him. Though the fanning wings of the multitudinous bees more than once threatened the feeble flame, he was not disappointed at the contact of fire and leaf.

The result was vividly illustrative of the burning bush of Moses, a thousand times magnified. There came, above the steady, roaring hum of the bees, the loud crackling of fire, and a sound like the rush of a whirlwind as it leaped from bush to bush, at the same time setting fire to the half-dry undergrass.

Green and in flower though the bushes were, the flames eagerly and rapidly devoured them. The interior of every clump was one white mass of heat, into which tumbled myriads of the buzzing insects, while the exterior was streaming with brilliant day-flame, mingling with columns of rolling smoke and fire.

The fire raged and spread. The whole valley was in flames. The crackling blaze rose high into the air, pulling down into its tens of thousands of miniature, whirling vortices the inhabitants of the Valley of the Bees. In fifteen minutes it was all over, except for the smoke, which rose from spots where the grass had been thicker and greener than in others. The trunks of the bee trees were burned and blackened, but the precious stores inside were uninjured by the fire.

Reed began to haul off his suit of aluminum gauze, no longer needed for protection, and Williams followed his example. The remaining bees were few in number, and their spirits utterly broken with the disorganization of their winged armies. What savage man had failed to do in centuries of time, the most destructive of the elements, ingeniously directed, had accomplished in the fractional part of an hour.

The launch was found grounded in the bushes on the opposite side of the stream the next day. There was a hole where the Mexican must have torn through the netting, jumping into the river in terror at the beginning of the battle with the bees, but he was never heard of again, either alive or dead. The honey harvest was gathered by Williams and Reed, requiring many trips for its conveyance to the nearest shipping port, where it sold for a sum many men would have considered the equivalent of two fortunes.